GPT-4o and DALL·E Paint Twelve Psychiatric Disorders from DSM-5

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Psychiatric diagnoses are typically conveyed through text—technical, clinical, and often emotionally distant. But what if we could *see* them instead? In this visual experiment, we asked GPT-4o, paired with DALL·E, to create symbolic surrealist paintings of twelve major mental health disorders as defined by the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition). Each image is based on a tightly distilled summary of diagnostic criteria, followed by a poetic prompt intended to evoke the internal reality of the condition. Rather than clinical literalism, the images aim to render the *subjective landscape*—what it might feel like to live with depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, or any of the conditions explored. The results are haunting, beautiful, and deeply symbolic. They invite viewers—clinicians, patients, educators, and artists alike—to reflect on the emotional truths that lie beneath diagnostic categories. This fusion of AI language modeling and generative art offers a novel way of accessing empathy. Through texture, shadow, distortion, and light, we glimpse the inner terrain of disorders that are otherwise hard to describe. In doing so, this work also explores the future of AI in mental health: not just as a tool for diagnosis, but as a *medium for understanding*.

Keywords: DSM-5, mental health, AI art, GPT-4o, DALL·E, surrealism, psychology, psychiatric disorders, visual medicine, symbolic art, empathy, hallucination, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD, autism, anorexia, personality disorders, dissociation, generative models, psychiatry, clinical education, digital humanities.

First DSM-5 Condition: Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)

DSM-5 Definition:

Major Depressive Disorder is characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, emptiness, or hopelessness nearly every day for at least two weeks, along with other symptoms like:

- Loss of interest or pleasure (anhedonia)
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia or hypersomnia)
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Prompt to DALL·E:

“An abstract, surreal painting of a solitary human figure in grayscale sitting under a heavy sky, surrounded by a vast, empty landscape. The figure has a faint shadow of color leaking from their heart, but everything else is desaturated. Cracked earth, wilted flowers, a clock melting over a rock, and distant blurry shapes evoke hopelessness, fatigue, and emotional emptiness. The mood is heavy and still. Soft lighting, low contrast, symbolism over realism.”

Figure 1. Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)

Second DSM-5 Condition: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

DSM-5 Definition:

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is marked by obsessions (persistent, unwanted thoughts, urges, or images) and/or compulsions (repetitive behaviors or mental acts that a person feels driven to perform). These behaviors aim to reduce anxiety or prevent a dreaded event, but they are often excessive or unrelated to reality.

Common themes:

- Fear of contamination
- Need for symmetry/order
- Forbidden/taboo thoughts
- Checking behaviors

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A symbolic surreal painting of a person trapped in a room made of repeating geometric patterns, each tile inscribed with an anxious thought. The figure frantically washes their hands under a faucet with no water, surrounded by clocks, tally marks, and identical stacked objects. A spiral staircase loops infinitely above. The color scheme includes sterile whites and anxious blues. A sense of mental looping and claustrophobia fills the scene.”

Figure 2. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Third DSM-5 Condition: Schizophrenia

DSM-5 Definition:

Schizophrenia is a chronic brain disorder involving a range of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dysfunctions, characterized by at least two of the following, each present for a significant portion of time during a 1-month period (with at least one being from the first three):

1. Delusions
2. Hallucinations
3. Disorganized speech
4. Grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior
5. Negative symptoms (e.g., diminished emotional expression, avolition)

Additional features often include social/occupational dysfunction and significant cognitive disruption.

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal painting of a fragmented human figure made of broken mirror shards, floating in a night sky filled with disjointed clocks, whispering mouths, and overlapping cityscapes. Some shards show different facial expressions (joy, fear, anger), while others reflect abstract visions or hallucinations. A tangle of wires and vines connects the figure to strange, glowing thought-bubbles. Mood is eerie, layered, and dreamlike. Lighting is sharp in some areas and deeply shadowed in others to evoke disorganization and perceptual confusion.”

Figure 3. Schizophrenia

Fourth DSM-5 Condition: Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

DSM-5 Definition:

Borderline Personality Disorder is marked by a pervasive pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-image, and emotions, as well as significant impulsivity. Key features include:

- Intense fear of abandonment
- Unstable or intense relationships
- Identity disturbance
- Impulsivity (e.g., in spending, sex, substance abuse)
- Emotional instability (rapid mood shifts)
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Inappropriate anger
- Transient, stress-related paranoia or dissociation

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A symbolic surreal painting of a person with a cracked mask holding it to their face, standing at the edge of a broken bridge suspended between night and day. Behind them are shifting mirror fragments showing conflicting self-images—angelic, monstrous, childlike, and seductive. Below is a dark sea filled with reaching hands and roses tangled in thorns. The sky rapidly changes color, blending storm clouds with sudden rays of sun. Emotional chaos and fear of abandonment are suggested by torn strings trailing from the figure’s back toward distant silhouettes fading into mist.”

Figure 4. Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

Fifth DSM-5 Condition: Panic Disorder

DSM-5 Definition:

Panic Disorder involves recurrent unexpected panic attacks, which are abrupt surges of intense fear or discomfort that reach a peak within minutes, accompanied by at least four of the following:

- Heart palpitations
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Shortness of breath or choking
- Chest pain
- Nausea or dizziness
- Derealization or depersonalization
- Fear of losing control or “going crazy”
- Fear of dying

The individual often develops **persistent concern** about additional attacks and changes their behavior in maladaptive ways.

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal painting of a person mid-scream, surrounded by warped corridors closing in like a tightening tunnel. Their chest is glowing red-hot, pulsing with panic. Floating above are translucent images of clocks, eyes, and collapsing walls. The floor is fracturing beneath them into spirals and cracks. Lightning streaks the sky outside a shattered window, while shadows of fearful faces press against the walls. The color palette uses intense reds and cold blues to evoke a sudden storm of terror.”

Figure 5. Panic Disorder

Sixth DSM-5 Condition: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

DSM-5 Definition:

PTSD is triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. It involves four clusters of symptoms:

1. Intrusion (e.g., flashbacks, nightmares)
2. Avoidance (of reminders, places, people)
3. Negative changes in thinking/mood (e.g., guilt, detachment, memory gaps)
4. Hyperarousal (e.g., being easily startled, sleep problems, anger)

These symptoms must last more than one month and cause significant distress or impairment.

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal painting of a soldier-like figure walking through a burning forest where the flames form ghostly faces and screaming mouths. Behind him trails a long shadow filled with scenes from the past—an explosion, a child crying, a friend falling. His eyes reflect a distant fire, and barbed wire wraps around his torso like a cage. Floating above are fragmented clocks and tattered flags. The landscape behind him splits between desolate desert and chaotic urban ruins, emphasizing trauma, memory, and inner conflict.”

Figure 6. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Seventh DSM-5 Condition: Bipolar I Disorder

DSM-5 Definition:

Bipolar I Disorder is characterized by at least **one manic episode**, which may be preceded or followed by **hypomanic** or **major depressive episodes**.

A **manic episode** is a distinct period (at least one week) of:

- Abnormally elevated or irritable mood
- Increased energy or goal-directed activity
- Inflated self-esteem, decreased need for sleep
- More talkative, racing thoughts
- Distractibility
- Risky behaviors (spending sprees, sexual indiscretions, etc.)

The episode is severe enough to cause marked impairment or necessitate hospitalization. Psychotic features may be present.

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal oil painting of a figure split vertically in two: one side glowing, euphoric, surrounded by vibrant sunbursts, flying clocks, and lightning bolts of inspiration; the other side muted, slumped, engulfed in shadows, with wilted flowers, broken instruments, and cracked mirrors. The background shifts from manic sunrise to depressive twilight. Above the figure, a storm of conflicting symbols—angel wings and Icarus feathers, spiral staircases, and teetering ladders—symbolizes the extremes of energy and despair.”

Figure 7. Bipolar I Disorder

Eighth DSM-5 Condition: Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID)

DSM-5 Definition:

DID is characterized by the presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states ("alters"), each with its own pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the self and environment. Key features include:

- Recurrent gaps in memory (inconsistent recall of everyday events, personal information, or trauma)
- Severe dissociation and detachment from identity
- Disruption in identity affects behavior, consciousness, perception, and cognition
- Often linked to extreme early trauma

Prompt to DALL·E:

"A surreal painting of a faceless figure standing in front of a shattered mirror, each shard reflecting a different personality—some calm, some screaming, some childlike, others malicious. The figure's shadow splits into multiple paths, each leading to a different surreal landscape: a playground, a battlefield, a courtroom, a void. Above, puppet strings from invisible hands control various limbs. The atmosphere is foggy, with flickering candles representing fragmented memories. A door behind the figure is slightly open, with light spilling through but chained shut."

Figure 8. Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID)

Ninth DSM-5 Condition: Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

DSM-5 Definition:

GAD is characterized by excessive anxiety and worry, occurring more days than not for at least six months, about a number of events or activities. The person finds it difficult to control the worry.

Accompanied by three or more of the following:

- Restlessness or feeling keyed up
- Being easily fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance

The worry is pervasive, shifting, and difficult to suppress, often without clear reason.

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal painting of a figure wrapped in translucent thread, sitting on a chair in a foggy room filled with question marks, ticking clocks, and looming shadows. Overhead, cloud-like thought bubbles burst into tangled vines that wrap around the walls. The floor is uneven and cracked, suggesting instability, while windows show changing skies—stormy, sunny, night, and dawn—indicating chronic, unfocused worry. The color palette is gray-blue with flashes of pale yellow, giving a sense of unease and overstimulation.”

Figure 9. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Tenth DSM-5 Condition: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

DSM-5 Definition:

Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction, along with restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period and cause significant impairment.

Core features include:

- Difficulty in social-emotional reciprocity
- Nonverbal communication challenges
- Difficulty developing, maintaining, or understanding relationships
- Repetitive movements, speech, or use of objects
- Inflexibility, insistence on sameness
- Highly restricted, fixated interests
- Hypo- or hyper-reactivity to sensory input

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal painting of a child inside a transparent cube, surrounded by a world of swirling color and noise they do not seem to notice. Inside the cube, everything is neat, orderly, and quiet—filled with patterns, spirals, and focused symbols like gears, stars, and numbers. Outside, ghostly figures gesture and speak, but their voices melt into abstract sound waves. A glowing thread connects the child’s hand to one specific shape outside—a spinning object—suggesting a rare point of deep connection. The palette contrasts cool blues inside with chaotic warm tones outside.”

Figure 10. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Eleventh DSM-5 Condition: Anorexia Nervosa

DSM-5 Definition:

Anorexia Nervosa is characterized by:

- Restriction of energy intake, leading to significantly low body weight
- Intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, even when underweight
- Disturbance in self-perceived weight or shape, undue influence of body weight/shape on self-evaluation, or persistent lack of recognition of the seriousness of current low body weight

Two subtypes:

1. Restricting type (dieting, fasting, excessive exercise)
2. Binge-eating/purging type (vomiting, laxatives, etc.)

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal painting of a thin figure gazing into a distorted mirror, where they see a much larger, grotesque reflection. Their body is partially transparent, revealing withered internal organs and a fragile ribcage growing like a birdcage. Around them lie uneaten food plates forming a pattern like flower petals. Shadowy voices whisper from the dark corners of the room, coiling into scales and measuring tapes. A halo of cracked porcelain surrounds the figure’s head, symbolizing fragility. The color scheme is pale—ivory, bone-white, and faded gold—evoking emptiness and illusion.”

Figure 11. Anorexia Nervosa

Twelfth DSM-5 Condition: Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD)

DSM-5 Definition:

Antisocial Personality Disorder is a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, occurring since age 15 years. The individual must be at least 18 years old and have a history of Conduct Disorder before age 15.

Traits include:

- Deceitfulness, lying, use of aliases, or conning others
- Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead
- Irritability and aggressiveness
- Reckless disregard for safety of self or others
- Consistent irresponsibility
- Lack of remorse after harming others

Prompt to DALL·E:

“A surreal oil painting of a person with a chameleon’s skin, half-smiling, standing over a cracked mask on the ground. Behind them lies a trail of broken contracts, torn hearts, and extinguished candles. Their shadow is cast in the shape of a snarling beast, though their posture is calm and charming. One eye is human, the other a reptilian slit. The background is a courtroom dissolving into a chaotic city, with faceless figures watching from the walls. Colors: dark reds, greys, and flickers of cold gold—evoking charm, danger, and moral erosion.”

Figure 12. Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD)